



DPI VISTA Monthly

September 2009

"Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. The best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will say we have done it ourselves."

-Lao Tzu

Jane Grinde
Project Director
Betsy Prueter
Project Coordinator
Ruth Anne Landsverk
Family Education Coordinator
Casey Gauthier
VISTA Leader
Penny Bruskin
VISTA Leader

Welcome to the DPI VISTA Project

By Penny Bruskin

Looking back to my first month of service with the DPI VISTA Project just under one year ago, I had no idea about how my VISTA service would play out. As a new community site in the middle of a budget crisis and an organizational overthrow, the Milwaukee Public Library wasn't in a position to point me in any specific direction. With this in mind, I remember coming into the project with a large amount of self-motivation knowing that I would have to pave my own way for the following year. In fact, it wasn't until I was months into my project that I was able to figure out how the VISTA model could fit with my organizing efforts at the Milwaukee Public Library.

Through many ups and downs this year, I have come to appreciate the VISTA model as an ever-evolving

organizing effort. If there is one piece of advice I could offer to new VISTAs who are unsure about the VISTA model and their roles at their sites, it would be to make sure every single idea, plan, event, or activity is sustainable. Rather than focusing simply on the number of events or projects that make you feel like you are getting things done, make sure that your actions give your site the tools to accomplish these goals without a VISTA in the future.

While this process may have been grueling at times, it has also motivated me to continue with the DPI VISTA Project for another year as a VISTA Leader. A large part of my surge in motivation stems from our new DPI Recovery Project, which incorporates direct community-minded initiatives such as job training and adult education into our current School, Family, and Community Partnership framework. Because libraries already offer these services as community sites and

resources, it made perfect sense that DPI would extend its VISTA program to include these measures. Focusing on a new scope within the larger DPI VISTA Project, VISTAs serving with the Library Recovery effort will no doubt face many of the challenges that I encountered as a new VISTA in a new project. For those in this position, I encourage you to take this “clean slate” opportunity to creatively work with your sites to build upon the VISTA framework in ways that work for your individual sites.

As I learned throughout my first VISTA term, your efforts and experiences will help provide structure to the program as we move forward into the coming year. When you come across barriers or frustrations, think about talking with other VISTAs in your position, with Casey or me as your VISTA Leaders, and with Betsy as your Project Coordinator. The DPI VISTA Project has much potential to do amazing things this year. I am very excited to experience all the incredible things that our project will create. I am also looking forward to getting to know you all this year!

VISTA Voices

By Betsy Prueter

What makes a good VISTA? The list is endless, and without question depends on your site, and your community needs and assets. But let’s ask a more specific question, what makes a good *DPI* VISTA? You were all hired because of your skills, experiences, and passion. And though you bring unique talents and expertise to this work, I want to

share lessons learned from our 2008-2009 Corps to help you all continue to develop the kinds of skills that will serve you well throughout your year of service. What follows are the VISTAs’ voices; genuine, honest, and insightful! (Check out an expanded version of this article on your Resource Flash Drive from Orientation).

Be patient.

“Patience is incredibly important when working with so many people to make new partnerships happen. In the same vein, because projects can take a little bit of time to develop, it is important to follow up with people on projects. I try to keep track of projects on my planner so that I can continually “check-in” on the status.”

Practice self-care.

“It would take a lot of checking myself and my plans to balance my time so that I did not overwork myself and burn out. I am the type of person who jumps into things with a lot of energy and passion; it was sometimes hard to hold back from doing more than would fit in a work week. I definitely think this was my most difficult thing to regulate, but a completely necessary thing to keep on your radar for your own health and sanity.”

Seek out fresh perspectives.

“Try to see it a different way. Sometimes, those of us in the business of helping people see things that fit too easily into stereotypes, start to give people too little credit for taking charge of their own lives, and feel like we have a better way. I have to constantly remind myself that I do not have the

answers. My education, my experience, and my opinions cannot change someone else's upbringing, education, or experiences. If I am not making the impact I want to make the responsibility often lies with me. What can I do differently? Am I getting trapped in judgmental thoughts? Am I respecting the individual's/group's/population's individuality and ability? A lot of what we are trying to accomplish can only be done through cooperation and collaboration. Getting trapped in judgment, superiority complexes, or stereotypes does not get me any closer to the goals I have set."

Be organized and a self-starter.

"When you are attempting to coordinate a number of different programs, staff members, and volunteers, organization really is the only way to work effectively and efficiently. If you present yourself as level-headed and organized, the people who are working with you and for you on whatever project or program you are doing will feel a lot better about what they are doing as well. This is also important when it comes to making and maintaining contacts. Community partners do not prefer doing business with someone who is late, cannot find the right paperwork, or runs around like a maniac. It really is easier for yourself and everyone around you to take a few extra minutes on the front and stay organized."

"Sometimes, you just have to take initiative yourself. The only way that people are going to know who you are and what you are doing is if you tell them. Do not be afraid to send out e-mails, talk to staff members, and brainstorm ideas. This isn't the

type of job where someone tells you what to do each moment of the day. You have to decide what you are going to do each day."

Network at your site and with VISTAs.

"I learned to not be afraid to ask for and accept encouragement. I like to think I could do things all on my own, and that I didn't need help. And when things fell through or didn't work out they way I planned, it was all on me. It's not true. Being a VISTA is being part of a team. Any VISTA is in that position. You're part of the DPI team, your part of your site's team, your part of the



community VISTA team. There is lots of support out there and you are part of that!"


"It's OK to take breaks. Having your office at a school gives you plenty of opportunities to mingle with the school community. If a teacher has their door open, you can step in quietly and observe. Don't forget to eat lunch with the staff. Don't hesitate to step outside during recess. All of these things give you a better view of the students and staff and can help you with your work and planning in the long run. Things won't work if you ignore the uniqueness of the people you are working with. So, don't spend every second at your desk. Take a walk and get to know people."

Buy-in first. Action second.

"The sustainability of any project is dependent on support from the site and its community. As much as a VISTA might want to push a project

forward, it will not yield lasting results unless someone at the site is willing to take up the work load once the VISTA is gone.”

Save the Dates!



September 9-10: DPI
VISTA Orientation,
Madison

September 10: Get to
Know Your
Site/Checklist/OSOT
due

September 18: website
updates due

Five Tough Questions about Student Achievement Every Action Team Should Ask

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

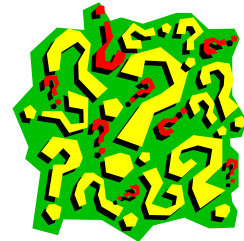
The Partnership Action Team is a great place for parents and teachers to look closely at how families can help children learn. Use your Action Team’s formidable knowledge, experience, and power to ask tough questions, get answers, and mobilize resources to make improvements.

Closing the achievement gap between students of color and their peers is an especially important Action Team goal. Wisconsin gained national headlines recently for

having the widest gap in the nation between white and black students on the 4th Grade math test. The average score for black students in Wisconsin was lower than for blacks in any Southern state, and 10 points below the national average for black students, the *New York Times* noted. In addition, Wisconsin was the only state in which the black-white achievement gap in 2007 was larger than the national average in state tests for 4th and 8th grades in both math and reading

(http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/15/education/15educ.html?_r=2&hpw).

Here are a few questions related to student achievement that your Partnership Action Team might want to explore with school administrators and staff:



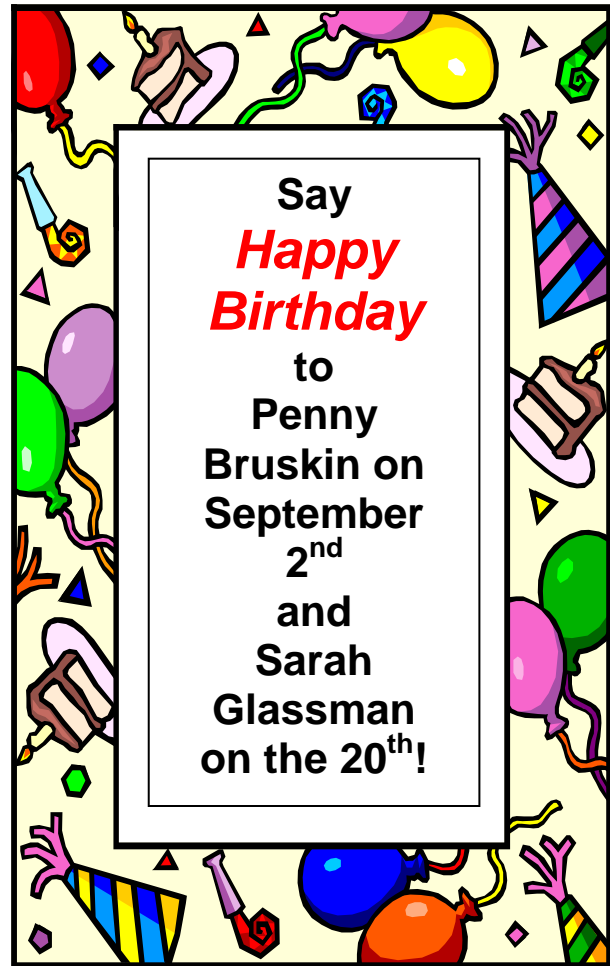
1. What progress is our school making in closing achievement gaps between different groups of students at different grade levels? Where are the gaps?
2. How does student achievement in our school compare to other schools in the district or to schools of similar size statewide? (visit the DPI WINSS website to view and to compare student achievement and other data about your school: <http://data.dpi.state.wi.us/data/selschool.asp>)
3. What evidence do we have that the programs or strategies to improve student achievement are working?

4. How can families help all students reach school learning goals?
5. What practices of family-school-community partnerships can help children achieve particular learning goals?

Discussing these questions over several meetings will help your Action Team come up with partnership goals for 2009-10, and design activities, events, and efforts to expressly meet those goals. Need ideas for how to assemble an Action Team? See pp. 106-108 in your copy of **School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action** by Joyce Epstein and Associates. Searching for what the Action Team should do at its first meeting? See pp. 109-110 in the handbook. Here are a few helpful forms you'll also want to use with your Action Team, all available in the handbook:

- Starting Points: An Inventory of Present Practices of School, Family, and Community Partnerships, pp. 174-177
- One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships, pp. 181 and 185
- Examples of activities that help schools meet student achievement (and other goals), p. 160, elementary; p. 226, middle and high school.

Don't worry – we'll cover all of this and much more at the September 9-10 training in Madison. See you there!



Stephanie answers Sylvia's questions

Stephanie is serving with the West Allis-West Milwaukee School District.



Sylvia: How is your first month as a VISTA going?

Stephanie: It has been going very well. All of the people I have met and am working with are very enthusiastic about getting parents more involved in the schools. I still feel like I have a lot to learn though!

Sylvia: What are you looking forward to most this year?

Stephanie: I am looking forward to reaching out to parents and hopefully getting parents and community members involved in the school for the first time. I also am looking forward to planning some fun events and activities for families.

Sylvia: What is your ethnic background?

Stephanie: European-American; I am Swiss, Irish, German, and Italian.

Sylvia: Where were you born and where have you lived?

Stephanie: I was born in Milwaukee, WI. I have lived in Green Bay, WI; St. Louis, MO; Madison, WI; Nice, France; Varanasi, India; Washington, D.C., and now Milwaukee.

Sylvia: If you could travel into the past where would you go and why?

Stephanie: I would travel to Italy during the Renaissance to be a part of the art and learning of the time....and wear the cool dresses!

Sylvia: What challenges are you expecting as a VISTA this year?

Stephanie: I expect it will sometimes be difficult to find the right strategies to appeal to parents and increase involvement in the schools. I am already seeing that it will be difficult not to be overwhelmed by all the projects that could be pursued. It is going to be important to always keep the big picture in mind.

Sylvia: What is in your refrigerator right now?



Stephanie: Hummus, milk, tortillas, strawberries, cilantro, coffee grounds, sour cream, sliced turkey, and yogurt.

Sylvia: If you only had four months to live what would you do with your time?

Stephanie: Travel the world with my family and friends.

Sylvia: Where is the most interesting place you have ever been?

Stephanie: India.

Sylvia: What one thing that has happened in your life has made the biggest impact on who you are today?

Stephanie: My mom has had the biggest impact on who I am today, but my experiences in India have shaped my passions and goals. I conducted research on the social, political, and economic impacts of decentralized educational policy implementation in rural villages in India while also teaching in a school for the children of women living in prostitution. Those experiences, as well as the people I met and worked with during my year in India, have set me down a path to pursue a career in development policy.

Sylvia answers Stephanie's questions

*Sylvia is serving with the Wausau
Early Childhood Program.*



Stephanie: If you could have a superpower, what would it be?

Sylvia: Probably super intelligence, then I could solve all the problems in the world!

Stephanie: What are you hoping to accomplish as a VISTA this year?

Sylvia: This year I hope to involve more low-income families with the school and community, especially in decision-making processes. I would like to strengthen the PTO and help make the VISTA accomplishments more sustainable through the PTO.

Stephanie: Who is your role model and why?

Sylvia: It's actually my boyfriend; trust me, there are many days when I would never admit it, but I really admire his big heart. I look up to him for all the obstacles he's had to overcome and admire his motivation.

Stephanie: Now that you have been at your site for a few weeks, what do you anticipate to be your biggest challenge as a VISTA?

Sylvia: I think my biggest challenge will be to be innovative and not just follow in the footsteps of the previous VISTA. I would also like to make the work more sustainable through the PTO.

Stephanie: What is your favorite book?

Sylvia: I have just started reading for enjoyment since that was impossible in college, but I don't really have a favorite book. I usually read news magazines and non-fiction.

Stephanie: Who is in your family and what are they doing?

Sylvia: Although we are not married, I consider my boyfriend my family. He is working as a chef and finishing up his culinary degree this school year.

Stephanie: If you had to eat only one thing for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Sylvia: I don't think I could ever pick one food-I love everything! I do kind of have a serious addiction to salt and vinegar chips and cheddar flavored chips!

Stephanie: If you were given two weeks to travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and what would you do?

Sylvia: I would either do a full world tour or spend one week in Italy and one week on a Grecian island.



Stephanie: What are your goals for the next five years?

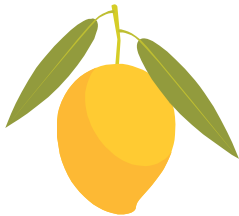
Sylvia: I don't have any final plans but some ideas for after this VISTA year are maybe to continue with AmeriCorps, a Masters degree, or the Peace Corps. By the end of the five years I hope to be in a long-term job that I love.

Stephanie: Where have you lived?

Sylvia: Alexandria, Egypt; Wausau, WI; and Madison, WI.

Recipe of the Month: Mango Guacamole

This month, Betsy shares a great year-round recipe with us; a homemade favorite with a sweet addition!



1 medium
avocado, pitted,
peeled, and
quartered
1/2 small jalapeno
chile, seeded,

finely chopped

1 small clove garlic, finely chopped

2 tbsp lime juice

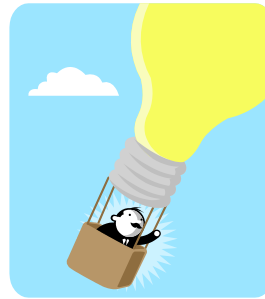
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro

1/8 tsp salt

1/2 medium mango, cut in half
lengthwise, seed removed, peeled
and diced

In food processor, place all
guacamole ingredients except
mango. Cover. Process with 3 or 4
on/off turns until coarsely chopped.
Place in small bowl; stir in mango.

“Hey! That’s a Good Idea!” Corner



**Roxane
Hagedorn,**
VISTA with
the Wausau
School
District, who
helped

compile a

volunteer handbook and volunteer
profile, is happy to report that those
documents have been translated in
Hmong and the Spanish translation
is taking place. The completed
translations are posted on the
district's website.

COMMUNICATING

Robyn Krimke, serving with U.S.
Grant Elementary School in
Milwaukee, has been working on
beating the rush by recruiting
volunteers for the new school year
early so that they can begin
volunteering right away.

VOLUNTEERING

Renee Pasewald, who served at
Lincoln Elementary School in
Oshkosh, collaborated with another
elementary school to coordinate a
recently obtained CLC grant and to
plan programming with community
organizations. **COLLABORATING**

Nicole Stachurski, VISTA at Grove
Elementary School in Wisconsin
Rapids, has had much success with
the Grove Summer Library Program.
One important aspect of the program
was that the library was also able to
remain open during certain hours
this summer so that students could
check out books to take home.

LEARNING AT HOME

Dustin Young, VISTA with the Dane County Transition School, has been preparing for the Action Team kick-off by orientating all interested members in goals, expectations, and potential. He hopes that this information will lead to sustainability as the ideas of the group are collective and for the benefit of the school. **DECISION MAKING**

Before you Recruit...

By Casey Gauthier



During our service as VISTAs, many of us are going to be recruiting volunteers at some time or another. Some of you may seek out large numbers of volunteers for a specific event. Some of you are trying to create a database of people who are willing to volunteer regularly. And some of you need just a few volunteers here and there. Whoever you are, you need volunteers! But what is the best way to get their attention and get them to commit?

I came across this online article recently and thought it said provided some great tips on watching out for negative messages we might have hidden in the tools we are using to recruit volunteers. The article comes from <http://energizeinc.com>, a resource specifically for leaders of volunteers. Take a look and ensure none of your recruitment tools include these barriers.

Think before you speak

- Don't use organization jargon, as it can be unintelligible to outsiders. Try giving a draft of your material to someone who does not work in your agency.
- Assess your use of the word "volunteer." Vary your vocabulary as fits your target audience. Use terms like community service, helping out, taking action, making a difference. Emphasize the title of the assignment itself, rather than the title, "Volunteer."

Will someone look at the pictures and think, "I could fit in there"?

- Use as many photographs as possible with a wide range of activities and types of people pictured.
 - Men and women;
 - A variety of ages and races;
 - Volunteers actually doing something, not just sitting around or posing for the camera;
 - Smiles;
 - Business or casual clothing;
 - Warmth and energy.

Location, Location, Location

- There is no mystery to recruiting a diverse corps of volunteers: ask a diverse audience of prospects. If you want to recruit African-American men, don't give a speech at the Polish-American Woman's Club.
- If you want reading tutors who are bilingual in Spanish, place recruitment announcements in the library branch that serves the Spanish-speaking part of town.

Receiving and maintaining volunteers

- Be receptive, friendly, and easy for volunteer prospects to contact.
 - Does the voice mail system offer an option for contacting the volunteer office or does every caller have to know a person's name? If the right person is not in, how is the message taken on the phone? Is the prospective volunteer thanked for calling? Assured that s/he will be called back (or is the applicant asked to call back)?
 - When you are in the midst of a recruitment campaign, take a moment to inform the frontline personnel. It's amazing how helpful receptionists, secretaries, even custodians can be if they understand their role in the welcoming process. And don't overlook professional colleagues.
 - It's just as important to assure the receptivity of volunteers already on board. Don't leave good relationships to chance. Involve current volunteers in the plans to recruit a more diverse group of volunteers and engage them in running orientation programs for the newcomers.

Grant Opportunities



Pay It Forward: Mini-Grants

Pay It Forward Mini-Grants fund one-time-only, service-oriented projects identified by youth as activities they'd like to perform to benefit their school, neighborhood, or greater community. Projects must contain a "pay-it-forward" focus -- that is, they must be based on the concept of one person doing a favor for others, who in turn do favors for others, with the results growing exponentially. Maximum award: \$500. Eligibility: K-12 youth.

Deadline: September 15, 2009.

<http://www.payitforwardfoundation.org/educators/mini-grant.html>

NEA Foundation: Student Achievement Grants

The NEA Foundation Student Achievement Grants fund the academic achievement of students by helping them to engage in critical thinking and problem-solving that deepen knowledge of standards-based subject matter. Work should also improve students' habits of inquiry, self-directed learning, and critical reflection. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: practicing U.S. public school teachers, public school

education support professionals, or faculty or staff at public higher education institutions.

Deadline: October 15, 2009.

http://www.neafoundation.org/programs/StudentAchievement_Guidelines.htm

Lowe's: Toolbox for Education

Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant program funds school improvement projects initiated by parents in recognition of the importance of parent involvement in education. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: K-12 schools (including charter, parochial, private, etc.) or parent groups (associated with a non-profit K-12 school).

Deadline: October 16, 2009.

<http://toolboxforeducation.com>

UnitedHealth Group/Youth Service America: Grants for 'Health Heroes'

UnitedHealth Group and Youth Service America are offering children the opportunity to become "Health Heroes" by learning about childhood obesity, designing programs to address it, and implementing the programs in their communities. Maximum award: \$1,000 in support of service-learning projects that focus on childhood obesity, engage youth between the ages of 5 and 25 in the planning and implementation process, and take place during Semester of Service (MLK Day, January 18, to Global Youth Service Day, April 23-25, 2010). Eligibility: educators, service-learning coordinators, and students in the health professions.

Deadline: October 22, 2009.

<http://ysa.org/MyYSA/YSAContent/YSAnews/tabid/219/articleType/Article>

[View/articleId/175/UnitedHealthHEROESServiceLearningGrantsDeadlineOctober22.aspx](http://www.ueh.org/View/articleId/175/UnitedHealthHEROESServiceLearningGrantsDeadlineOctober22.aspx)

American School Board Journal: Magna Awards

The American School Board Journal's 16th annual Magna Awards honor outstanding programs developed or supported by school boards that showcase school district leadership, creativity, and commitment to student achievement. Maximum award: \$4,000. Eligibility: local school boards.

Deadline: October 31, 2009.

<http://www.asbj.com/MainMenuCategory/Supplements/MagnaAwards/WhatisMagna.aspx>

Prudential: Spirit of Community Awards

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards honor young people in grades 5 through 12 who have demonstrated exemplary voluntary service to their communities. Maximum award: \$5,000 for honoree; \$5,000 grant from the Prudential Foundation to a nonprofit, charitable organization of their choice. Eligibility: students grades 5-12 who have conducted a volunteer service activity within the past year.

Deadline: November 2, 2009.

<http://spirit.prudential.com/view/page>